

SEAN SCULLY  
NEO NEO INC.  
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011  
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427  
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

**DANIELA NAME**

**“O GLOBO”**

(Questions to Sean Scully on the occasion of *Sean Scully: Wall of Light*,  
Centro de Arte Heilio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil August-November 2002)

***Brazil is a country that gave its own reading of Constructivism's influence. Do you feel, do you see your work also as a kind of answer to this legacy of the history of art?***

Constructivism has interest to me, though I find it rigid and cold in its original form. There are Brazilian painters who interest me, who work abstract and geometric. The bigger, more interesting question for me involves the dialogue between the North and the South. I am from Ireland and perhaps this is one of the reasons that I identify with the South. Therefore, for me, Art is fundamentally spiritual and deeply emotional. I can feel this in Brazil.

That means that geometric art only becomes interesting when it is emotional, when there is space to involve the individual poetic sensibility. When it touches sensibility it can be humanized and transformed. Another way to discuss the North-South argument, is to propose that energy comes from the southern parts of the world and is utilized, mechanized and exploited in the North.

So, even though my work is geometric, it is made with a personal energy. I want the emotion to overcome the geometry, and humanize it.

***You work on canvas but also with paper. Are your preoccupations/discussions the same when you are working in these two different media?***

I work on paper with watercolor, line and pastel. I also make prints and photographs. In addition I make paintings on many different scales and

SEAN SCULLY  
NEO NEO INC.  
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011  
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427  
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

formats. Also, the concerns in my paintings and drawings are consistent, but they are exposing something very different because of their material, body, personality. The issue of body and physicality is fundamental to my intentions.

A close friend of mine told me that my watercolors look like they were made by an angel, I told her that they were made by an angel, she said, "good disguise". Because I don't look like an angel, I look like a bear, but I have an angel in me. And when that angel needs to speak, he/she needs the gentle voice of light and transparency, and the small intimate scale of watercolor.

My very big paintings are something else. They confront history, the burden and power of history, and they attempt to carry it into the future. A great love and connection with the history of religious and romantic painting is embedded into the surfaces of these works. Though, what I paint (the forms) is very much a part of contemporary life.

***Some critics announced the end of painting. But you are still painting, and well. What do you think about this "announced death"?***

At the end of the Renaissance in Italy, in 1520, it was announced that painting was dead. Because with Raphael, it had reached a point of perfection and could therefore not develop. However, it developed in ways that were not simply formal. With Titian painting became more emotional and sensual and psychological, and it found a way to go forward.

So far, this process has been repeated hundreds of times. Painting, because it is so reflective of the human heart, the eye, and the mind, has continually and endlessly found ways to rejuvenate itself. Everything, every mark that is put down on a painting, reflects exactly, and with ruthless honesty, the intention and understanding of that mark. Painting is naked and fundamental, in a way that no other visual art medium can compete with. It may be true to say that a form such as a square or a stripe, has been

SEAN SCULLY  
NEO NEO INC.  
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011  
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427  
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

seen before. But the way a line is drawn or painted, is infinitely connected to who painted it or drew it, and why. The intention and the emotion fundamentally defines over and over again, what the message is. In that sense, it has the directness and immediacy of music. If you play a note, the note is informed and defined by how you play it.

The big question is, for the next generation of young painters, whether they have the belief and the endurance to withstand the temptations of quick results that can be achieved through cameras and technology. Because painting requires a heightened level of intuition, where the body and the intellect have to fuse over time into an ability to make and see at the same time.

***In History of Art, lots of movements/artists studied colour and composition and their relationship with music, mathematics and science. How do you choose and arrange your colours?***

The forms in my paintings are seemingly simple geometric divisions using horizontals and verticals, the architectonic language of the contemporary world. However, the way they are painted and the color they are painted is inseparable from the infinite drama of me putting the paint down. The color is entirely connected to its materiality. And it could not exist, as that color, in any other way.

***What are your most important influences?***

My most important influences are everything. I am touched by everything, I hope, and that influences me and is therefore an influence. That includes the color of the sky, which finds its way into my paintings every day.

In art I am paraphrasing and maintaining a line of belief that includes: Cimabue, Titian, Courbet, Van Gogh, Matisse, and Rothko.

SEAN SCULLY  
NEO NEO INC.  
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011  
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427  
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

***After 20th century spectator's participation is a very important question in art. How can we construct/feel the participation in your paints? Is it possible?***

My problem with the interactive media-diverse approach to museum programming is that it turns the museum into a fun house for adults.

You can participate in my works in a way that is more silent. The surface, and the way that it is made, is a bridge into an abstract moment of freedom. The relationships in my paintings are full of the light of uncertainty. And this uncertainty offers you the possibility to complete the closure, of making this relationship defined in the way that you feel, or can use it, in that moment in your life.

***You concentrate your paint in basic forms. How did you select them? And how can you still reinvent them today?***

I really took my forms from the urban world. From the grid of the urban world. Though recently, the vertical and the horizontal began to transform its meaning for me, and to become connected to the standing human figure and the eternal horizon line by which we locate ourselves. My painting is not a question of re-invention; it is a process of evolution, a sensibility developing and thus transforming the emotional reality of what is being painted. I have tied myself to my work in every way. I change; it changes. It changes; I change. This is the polar opposite of formalism.

***In the 70's you reduced the colours in your works, but you preserved the shadow and a kind of density. Why? Did the lines, the stripes become more important than the colours?***

In the 70's, I lived the crisis of moving from a complex European environment, to the highly focused brutality and intellectual intensity of

SEAN SCULLY  
NEO NEO INC.  
447 WEST 17 STREET NY, NY 10011  
212.243.3988 FAX 212.243.0427  
NEONEO1@EARTHLINK.NET

New York. I took everything out of my work that seemed decorative or non-essential. I wanted to make something extreme, rigorous and elevated. The work became linear and strict. Less sensual and connected to the world of nature than it is now. The color became almost Zen, in the way that it hovered, on the edge of the world. It was the color of dying light.

***It seems beauty is a pejorative in art now. For you, is beauty still important?***

After the, probably, temporary fall of Modernism, we have the fall of everything that was associated with it. Now beauty has been cast out, and she sits on the side of the highway, like a homeless vagabond.

However, beauty, for me, is an essential part of tragedy and hope. But beauty, in order to survive, must surround itself with mystery.

In China, as the communist regime began to soften its edges, there was a moment about a decade ago, when the people were informed that it was permissible now to keep exotic fish at home in little aquariums. The fish do not necessarily deserve to be in jail, just for the innocent crime of being fish, though it does show that even a regime as authoritarian as communist China finally recognizes that the need for beauty irrepressibly human.

***You were born in Dublin, but works in Barcelona and New York. Did these cities change your work?***

All the cities that I live in change my work; that is why I live there. I could easily live in the soft light of Barcelona, near the ocean. But I am also fascinated by the battle for ideas that rages in New York. My mind is engaged by one, and my emotional life by the other.